STAT
Sanitized Copy Approved for Release 2010/06/18 : CIA-RDP90-00552R000202030031-2
ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 23 CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITO
27 MAY 1983

Does the US really need more Soviet specialists?

By Lawrence J. Goodrich

Every now and then Americans are carried away by the fear that in some way or other they have fallen behind the Russians, and a crash program is needed to catch up. This has happened several times since World War II.

Just before I entered elementary school, the Russians beat us off the starting line in the space race with their launching of Sputnik. Then, in 1960, they won more gold medals than Americans at the Rome Olympics. As a result, my first few years of school were spent in learning that we had to study science and support the space program, or the Russians would outdo us in outer space. And in exercising and high-jumping we were under the constant threat from our gym teachers that, if we did not excel, the Russians would beat us again at the 1964 Olympiad. Even the new President, John F. Kennedy, got into the act: If all those Russian couples in Africa were converting the masses to communism by their examples, we were told, we had to go and convert them to democracy — in the Peace Corps.

Now, at a time when the Soviet Union is going through a sensitive period of leadership transition and the Soviet economy is experiencing declining growth rates, someone has discovered that the Russians have opened up yet another lead: the number of US specialists in the Soviet Union vs. the number of Soviet-affairs specialists in the United States.

The American public is being regaled with stories of James Bond-type KGB agents prowling US streets with Chicago accents and Brooks Brothers suits who can recite all the requirements for running in the Iowa primary. US Soviet specialists in the academic world are quoted as being deeply concerned about the declining number of students in their field. Former US ambassador and governor of New York Averell Harriman has generously given a large sum of money to Columbia University to strengthen its Soviet studies program (already one of the best in the country).

The thesis of this "campaign" is that all our Soviet specialists are growing old and getting ready to retire. There is no one to take their place, it seems, and America's ship of Soviet policy is about to be left without rudder or helmsman.

The situation is being blown out of all proportion. We are about to encourage a large number of young people to embark on programs of study which, although fascinating and timely from the liberal arts standpoint, are going to lead nowhere when the time comes to look for a job.

It is utterly untrue that there is a dearth of Soviet experts today, in the government or out. The State Department, Defense Department, CIA, and other government agencies have a wealth of personnel who have either academic or government training in Soviet studies and who speak Russian. American schools are already training many more Soviet specialists than there are jobs for. The Soviet desk at the State Department, for example, receives a constant flow of letters and résumés from job seekers with master's degrees or PhDs in Russian or Soviet studies. I know one woman with such a degree who is working as a secretary while she pounds the pavement looking for work in the Soviet studies field.

The reality is that the government is one of the very few places where substantial numbers of Soviet specialists can find work. US corporations are not scouting the campus placement centers looking for them. When a US firm wants someone with Russian-language ability, it will look for someone with an MBA and send him to Berlitz, thank you.

I do not deny the need for a constant supply of Soviet specialists with Russian-language ability. There is some cause for concern. A former language major at university myself, I know only too well the need for more Americans to study foreign languages and cultures, and rue the day when universities abolished language requirements. As a career foreign service officer, I am well aware of the need for more Americans to take an interest in foreign affairs and learn more about the world from which they are no longer isolated.

But rushing off madly to train hordes of Soviet specialists who will not be employed after graduation is not the answer. What really is needed is for more high schools and universities to put more emphasis on foreign affairs and language study in general. This would not only better educate Americans about the countries whose actions have such great impact on their lives; it would lead to better-educated political leaders, and they are the people who actually make the policy decisions. America can no longer afford the luxury of ignoring the rest of the planet.

Lawrence J. Goodrich is a career foreign service officer currently working in the Office of Soviet Union Affairs in the US Department of State. His views are his own and do not necessarily reflect those of the department.

Sanitized Copy Approved for Release 2010/06/18 : CIA-RDP90-00552R000202030031-2